Roman Law in the State of Nature offers a new interpretation of the foundations of Hugo Grotius' natural law theory. Surveying the significance of texts from classical antiquity, Benjamin Straumann argues that certain classical texts, namely Roman law and a specifically Ciceronian brand of Stoicism, were particularly influential for Grotius in the construction of his theory of natural law. The book asserts that Grotius, a humanist steeped in Roman law, had many reasons to employ Roman tradition and explains how Cicero's ethics and Roman law – secular and offering a doctrine of the freedom of the high seas – were ideally suited to provide the rules for Grotius' state of nature. This fascinating new study offers historians, classicists, and political theorists a fresh account of the historical background of the development of natural rights, natural law, and international legal norms as they emerged in seventeenth-century early modern Europe.

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ROMAN LAW IN THE STATE OF NATURE

The Classical Foundations of Hugo Grotius’ Natural Law

BENJAMIN STRAUMANN

TRANSLATED BY

BELINDA COOPER
“[Moral] science had been most highly esteemed by the wisest of the ancients, who devoted themselves to its study with great care. It then lay buried under debris, together with almost all the other noble arts, until a little after the beginning of the last century, when it was restored to more than its pristine splendor... by the incomparable Hugo Grotius in his outstanding work *The Rights of War and Peace.*”

Gershom Carmichael (1724)

“[L]es compilations de Grotius ne méritaient pas le tribut d’estime que l’ignorance leur a payée. Citer les pensées des vieux auteurs qui ont dit le pour et le contre, ce n’est pas penser.”

Voltaire (1768)

“The system of Grotius is implicated with Roman law at its very foundation, and this connection rendered inevitable – what the legal training of the writer would perhaps have entailed without it – the free employment in every paragraph of technical phraseology, and of modes of reasoning, defining, and illustrating, which must sometimes conceal the sense, and almost always the force and cogency, of the argument from the reader who is unfamiliar with the sources whence they have been derived.”

Henry Sumner Maine (1861)
## Contents

**Preface and acknowledgments**  page ix  
**Abbreviations**  xii  
**A note on texts and translations**  xvi  

1. Introduction  1  
2. Natural law in historical context  24  
3. A novel doctrine of the sources of law: nature and the classics  37  
4. The influence of classical rhetoric on Grotius’ method  51  
5. Social instinct or self-preservation?  83  
6. Justice for the state of nature: from Aristotle to the *Corpus iuris*  103  
7. Grotius’ concept of the state of nature  130  
8. Roman remedies in the state of nature  157  
9. Natural rights and just wars  170  
10. Enforcing natural law: the right to punish  207  

**Epilogue**  221  
**Bibliography**  235  
**Index**  251
Preface and acknowledgments

This book presents an argument about the foundations of Hugo Grotius’ system of natural law. While Grotius provided a very wide variety of citations to develop and bolster his theory, only certain kinds of sources were authoritative, namely Roman law and Ciceronian ethics – or so this monograph argues. My book does not simply take Grotius’ practice of citation as conclusive, but instead offers an argument that specific Roman sources were much more important to Grotius than the other texts he cites and indeed provided the foundations for his highly influential system of natural jurisprudence.


Significant parts of this book are based on my previous Hugo Grotius und die Antike. Römisches Recht und römische Ethik im frühneuzeitlichen Naturrecht, which appeared with Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft (Baden-Baden) back
Preface and acknowledgments

in 2007 and had grown out of my Zurich doctoral thesis written under the supervision of Beat Naf. I am grateful to Nomos for allowing me to use material from that book. The present book represents a thoroughly revised, restructured, and updated version of the previous study, to which quite a bit of newly written material has been added that reflects my latest thinking on the subject. Substantial parts have been expertly translated from the original German by Belinda Cooper. To the extent that the language is comprehensible and clear this is Belinda’s achievement. I have hugely profited not only from her knowledge of German and general linguistic sensitivity but also from her expertise in law and history.

This monograph and its German predecessor have been a long time in the making, and I have incurred many debts on the way. Beat Naf invited me to write the article on Rome in the reception section of Der Neue Pauly (Brill’s New Pauly) and furthered my interest in the classical tradition early on; what this kind of research can contribute to the study of the history of political thought shall become apparent, I hope, from the present book. An invitation to a conference at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study assisted me in thinking about my main arguments. Thanks are due especially to Hans Blom, Laurens Winkel, Peter Haggenmacher, Peter Borschberg, and Martine van Ittersum (who let me read a draft of her Profit and Principle). Laurens Winkel later was to provide very useful critical comments at the thesis defense, and Jörg Fisch and Wilfried Nippel helped to get the research off the ground and supported my application for funding from the Forschungskredit of the University of Zurich. The Forschungskredit and the Swiss National Science Foundation deserve ample thanks for their generous support over the years.

In the United States and further afield, many excellent scholars have provided support, read drafts and provided input over the years, chief among them Clifford Ando, David Armitage, Lauren Benton, Nehal Bhuta, Andrew Fitzmaurice, Jacob Giltaij, Leslie Green, Kinch Hoekstra, Benedict Kingsbury, Martti Koskenniemi, Randall Lesaffer, David Lupher, Jon Miller, Anthony Pagden, Peter Schröder, Kajus Tuori, Jeremy Waldron, Joseph Weiler, James Whitman, and James Zetzel. At New York University School of Law, William Nelson, Daniel Hulsebosch, and the Golieb fellows were hospitable to my distinctly un-American legal historical activities. I have much profited from Annabel Brett’s impressive erudition and would like to thank Chris Brooke, Knud Haakonsen, and Peter Garnsey for their help and scholarly and friendly correspondence. The late István Hont, whose own work is a model to aspire to, provided me the opportunity to make a presentation in Cambridge and kindly hosted me at King’s
Preface and acknowledgments

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Abbreviations

**ARPB**

**BHG**

**BR**

**CC**

**CD**

**CI**

**CLP**

**CT**

**DC**
Abbreviations

**DCQ**

**EL**

**Encyclopédie**

**EPM**

**IB**

**IBP**

**IBP Barbeyrac**

**IBP Gronovius**
Grotius, Hugo. *De jure belli ac pacis libri tres, in quibus jus naturae & gentium, item juris publici praecipua explicantur. Cum annotatis auctoris, ejusdemque dissertatione De mari libero; ac libello singulari De aequitate, indulgentia, & facilitate; nec non Joann. Frid. Gronovii nostis in totum opus De jure belli ac pacis. Editionem omnium, quae hactenus prodierunt, emendatissimam, ad fidem priorum & optimarum recensuit; loca pleraque auctorum...*
Abbreviations

laudatorium distinctius designavit; innumerous in illis erores sustulit aut indicavit, notulas denique addidit Joannes Barbeyrac. Amsterdam, 1720 (= Ter Meulen and Diermanse 1950, no. 602).


MC Selden, John. *Mare clausum, seu, De dominio maris libri duo. I. Mare, ex iure naturae seu gentium, omnium hominum non esse commune, sed dominii privati seu proprietatis capax, pariter ac tellurem, esse demonstratur. II. Serenisimum Magnae Brittaniae regem maris circumfluit, ut individuae atque perpetuae imperii britannici appendicis, dominum esse asseritur: accedunt Marci Zuerii Boxhornii apologia pro navigationibus Hollandorum adversus Pontum*
Abbreviations


Theses LVI Grotius, Hugo. Theses sive Quaestiones LVI de iure hominis in actiones et res suas. MS University Library Leiden, BPL 922 I foll. 287–90.


TLL Suárez, Francisco. Tractatus de legibus ac Deo legislatore. Naples, 1872.


A note on texts and translations

*De iure praedae* (abbreviated as *IPC*) is cited after Hugo Grotius, *De iure praedae commentarius*. A Collotype Reproduction of the Original Manuscript of 1604, ed. J. B. Scott, The Classics of International Law 22, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1950); when *IPC* is cited in English, the following translation was used: Hugo Grotius, *De iure praedae commentarius. Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, trans. G. L. Williams, with W. H. Zeydel, ed. J. B. Scott, The Classics of International Law 22, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1950). *Mare liberum* (*ML*) too is cited after this *IPC* edition, except for passages not contained in *IPC*, which have been taken from James Brown Scott’s 1916 edition. *De iure belli ac pacis* (*IBP*) is cited after the reprint, with added notes by Robert Feenstra (Aalen 1993), of the edition of 1939. For the translation, I have used Richard Tuck’s edition of the anonymous English 1738 translation of Barbeyrac’s annotated edition (Indianapolis, 2005); translations of the 1625 edition are my own. Some of the translations have on occasion been modified. The translations of the *Theses LVI* are mine. For Cicero’s *Republic* and *Laws* as well as the relevant fragments by Lactantius and Augustine I have used the translations by James E.G. Zetzel in the Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge, 1999) and for Cicero’s *De officiis* the translation by Margaret Atkins in the same series (Cambridge, 1991). For Cicero’s *De finibus* I used Julia Annas’ edition, translated by Raphael Woolf (*On Moral Ends*, Cambridge, 2001). Translations of Justinian’s *Digest* are taken from the edition by Alan Watson (revised edition, Philadelphia, 1998). Classical authors are cited according to prevailing scholarly standards, and medieval, early modern and modern authors are cited by name and date as indicated in the Bibliography below. With regard to classical authors as well as legal compilations I have used standard editions and methods of citation.